

Business Directory

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Lesson for Dec. 24
Golden Text.—Fear not: for, be-
hold, I bring you good tidings of
great joy, which shall be to all
people. For unto you is born this
day in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord.
—Luke 2:10, 11

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

Approach to the Lesson
Each recurring Christmas season brings again to men the reminder of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save sinners. We do not know exactly when His incarnation took place. Scripture does not give us any record of the celebration of His birthday by the apostolic church, but early in the Christian centuries this annual memorial seems to have been substituted for a pagan festival, which was celebrated on or about December twenty-fifth. However, we can surely thank God that in His divine providence He has permitted this. It is well that from year to year mankind should be reminded that God came down to earth in the person of His Son to recall us to Himself and to redeem us from our sins. Every Christmas carol sounding through the air emphasizes this great and important truth and is a challenge to all to heed the Gospel message and to receive the Saviour it proclaims. "Luke, the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14), gives us the fullest account of the nativity that we have in Scripture, but he is not alone in declaring the virgin birth of our Lord. Matthew attests this very clearly (Matt. 1:18), and it is certainly implied in Galatians 4:4. Unbelieving scholars have attempted to invalidate Isaiah's prophecy about the virgin birth (Isa. 7:14), but these New Testament records confirm its truth. It was God, the eternal Son of the Father, who stooped in grace to link humanity with His deity and to enter the world which He Himself has made (John 1:3) through the gate of birth. Manifestly, in the very nature of things, He could have no human father, but as man born on earth He was "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). He did not begin to live when He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, but He came voluntarily from the glory He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5) into this new condition in order that He might become the Redeemer of the world.

The Historical Setting
The birth of Jesus really took place about four years prior to the beginning of the account designated Anno Domini. Through a misunderstanding as to the date of Herod's death, chronologists dated Christ's birth too late. Later investigation revealed this error, and we now know that Jesus was born in the year which we would have to call 4 B.C., and His death took place in the year A.D. 30 instead of A.D. 33, as formerly supposed. As to Luke, the author of the third Gospel and the Book of Acts, we have no way of determining whether he was a Hellenistic Jew or Gentile proselyte, but the first view is the more probable. He became a companion of the Apostle Paul on the latter's second missionary journey, joining the company at Troas and going with them to Macedonia. From that time until the martyrdom of the apostle he remained with him except for short intervals when he stayed behind in various places to confirm young converts in the faith. He was Paul's sole companion in his second imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:11).

Verse by Verse
Luke 2:1.—"All the world." This expression refers to that part of the world dominated by the Roman Empire. It did not include those lands inhabited by uncivilized or barbarous people outside the limits of Rome's authority. The word here translated "world" was definitely applied in this way to the Roman world.

Verse 2.—"When Cyrenius was governor of Syria." In years gone by, certain critics thought they had detected a chronological error here, but it is a well-known fact that Cyrenius was twice governor of Syria and held that office at the

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very time here indicated.

Verse 3.—"Every one into his own city." Note how God overruled in this way, in order that Micah's prophecy, given 700 years before, might be literally fulfilled (Mic. 5:2).

Verse 4.—"He was of the house and lineage of David." The genealogy given in Matthew shows that Joseph, though but a humble carpenter, was the direct heir to the throne of David. Through his marriage to Mary, before the Holy Child was born, he conveyed the throne rights to Jesus.

Verse 5.—"Mary his espoused wife." The genealogy given in Luke 3, in which Joseph is spoken of as the son of Heli (Luke 3:23), is evidently that of Mary, through whom our Lord was lineally descended from David through his son Nathan. Heli was the father of Mary. Joseph is said to be "of Heli" because he was his son-in-law.

Verse 6.—"While they were there, the days were accomplished." Thus after their arrival in Bethlehem, to be enrolled for the taxation, the full time came for the birth of the Holy Babe.

Verse 7.—"No room for them in the inn." What a pathetic commentary on the attitude of this world toward its Creator! He who made all things found no welcome when He came unto His own. Here He took the lowest place—born in a stable and cradled in a manger—but that manger has become, through all the centuries since, the symbol of unselfish love and unyielding devotion. Bethlehem was the first step down from the throne of glory to the cross of Calvary.

Verse 8.—"There were... shepherds abiding in the field." All unconscious of the unspeakably great event that had taken place in the town that night, these simple, God-fearing men were watching over their flock in a near-by pasture. To them the first announcement of the birth of the King was to be given.

Verse 9.—"The angel of the Lord came upon them." Four hundred years had passed since angel visitants had appeared on earth. Then suddenly Gabriel came to Zacharias to announce the birth of John the Baptist and then later to Mary the virgin, to whom he communicated the wonderful news that she was to be the mother of God's Messiah. Now a glorious angel appeared to the astounded shepherds as the glory of God covered the heavens.

Verse 10.—"Good tidings of great joy." This was the first Gospel proclamation of the new dispensation, a message for all the people of the world—not for Israel only.

Verse 11.—"A Saviour... Christ the Lord." Though born to rule the universe in righteousness, the emphasis was placed upon His Saviourhood, rather than upon His kingship, though both were included in the angel's message.

Verse 12.—"This shall be a sign." Not a royal child in a palace, wrapped in costly garments, but a peasant babe in swaddling clothes, resting where the cattle feed.

Verse 13, 14.—"A multitude of the heavenly host... saying, Glory to God in the highest." All Heaven was aflame with holy excitement, while the people of Bethlehem and of all Palestine slumbered on, unaware of the advent of the long promised Deliverer. The message of peace on earth, good will toward men fell only on the ears of the shepherds!

Verse 15.—"Let us now go... and see." With humble minds and reverent faith the shepherds wended their way to the city, that they might see for themselves the one of whom the angels had spoken.

Verse 16.—"They came with haste, and found" the holy family: Mary, the mother; Joseph, her husband and protector; and the baby Saviour. What emotion must have filled their hearts as they looked upon the little face and realized that the one of whom the prophets spoke had appeared at last on earth!

The Heart of the Lesson

At this happy season of the year our hearts turn once more to the wonderful story of the coming into the world of God's beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose advent in grace was predicted so definitely hundreds of years before His birth. The city of His birth was foretold by Micah (chap. 5:2); Isaiah declared that He would be born of a virgin mother (Isa. 7:14). Both of these prophecies were fulfilled to the letter, but although the Jews had been looking for the coming of their Messiah for hundreds of years, there were few who recognized Him as the promised King when He came in such deep humiliation. As our colored friends sometimes sing in one of the tenderest and most touching of their spirituals:

Sweet little baby Jesus,
Dear little holy Child,
They didn't know who You was.
Let us challenge our own hearts
as to whether we have recognized
in Him the Christ of God and have
received Him by faith as our own
Saviour and Lord.

The seven wonders of the modern world are the airplane, radium, antiseptic, antitoxins, X-ray, radio and the telephone.

We have a hunch mirrors were invented to show us who is to blame for most of our troubles.



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